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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST ROADNET IN THE LAOS PANHANDLE



CIA/BI GM 67-I
July 1966

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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COMMUNIST ROADNET IN THE LAOS PANHANDLE*

The Communist roadnet in the panhandle of Laos has been the major overland route for the movement of men and supplies from North Vietnam to combat areas of South Vietnam. Since February 1965 the Communists more than doubled the mileage of this roadnet (see Map A). The new construction extended the road system and also provided alternate routes and bypasses within the panhandle, most notably an alternate to Route 23, which had been a major north-south segment of the roadnet during the 1964-65 dry season (see Map B). The Communists now have a continuous north-south route that extends from Mu Gia Pass southward about 300 miles to the vicinity of the Cambodian border. Roads built between January and May 1966 also give the Communists two new access routes into the panhandle: 1) Route 137/912, which extends from North Vietnam into Laos, providing an alternate to the Mu Gia Pass route; and 2) Route 110, the so-called Sihanouk Trail from Cambodia into Laos, which joins the southern end of Route 96. The Communists are now taking advantage of the prevailing dry season in southern North Vietnam to construct a strategic alternate route that will join Route 137/912 (see Map B). The new route is at a higher elevation than Route 1A on the wet coastal lowlands, and it will have fewer interdiction targets such as bridges and ferry sites.

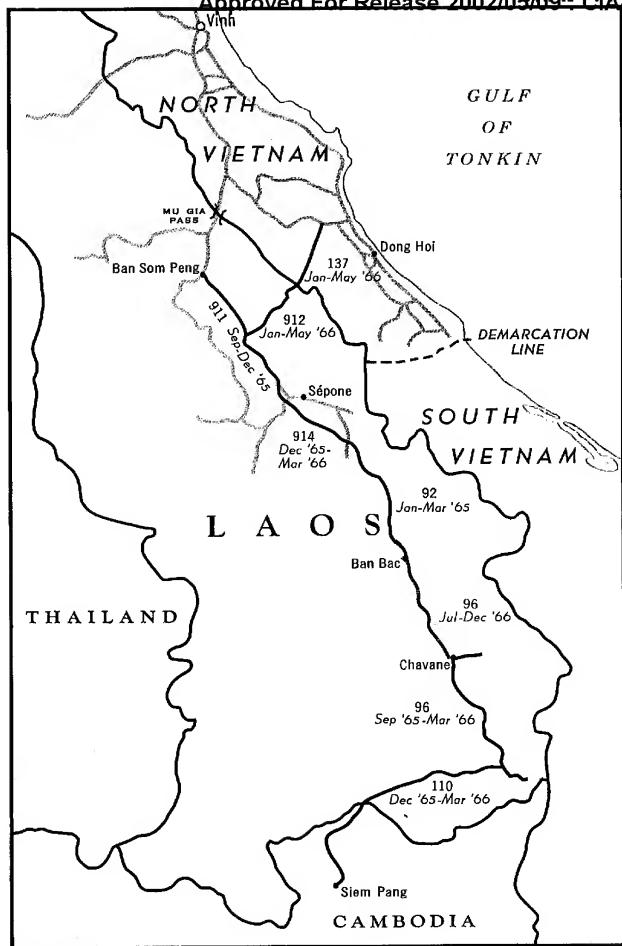
New road construction and major repairs are usually done during the dry season, October into May (see Map A); during the 1965-66 dry season the extensive work done by the Communists indicated their intent to keep the expanded roadnet open through the 1966 summer rainy season. Many sections were corduroyed, and logs and gravel for contingencies were piled beside the roads throughout the network. In their haste to complete the roadnet, however, the Communists did not construct the necessary retaining walls and drainage facilities on Routes 92 and 96 from Route 9 south to the Cambodian border. Consequently, the heavy monsoonal rainfall has caused landslides along this route, and road embankments in a number of locations have collapsed (see photograph). These landslides and the bomb craters resulting from aerial interdiction efforts have closed the route to through vehicular traffic during the present rainy season. The major areas of landslides and cratering are shown on Map B. The multiple craters and collapsed road embankments together with the continuing heavy rainfall—some 96 to 112 inches, about 80 percent of the annual total, occurs during the summer—are major obstacles to repairing the roadnet.

The limiting effect of the summer monsoon rains on Communist logistics in the Laos panhandle is a seasonal phenomenon, as shown in the following tabulation of estimated figures on truck traffic since December 1964.

1964-65 Dry Season	17 trucks (estimated average for 180 days, Dec 64-May 65) carrying at least 2 tons each moved south daily on Rt 23.
1965 Rainy Season	No through truck traffic between Mu Gia Pass and Rt 92. Rt 23 impassable to through traffic, beginning June 1965. Some truck traffic on Rt 92 from Rt 9 to Rt 922.
1965-66 Dry Season	24 trucks (estimated average for 210 days, mid-Nov 65-mid-June 66) carrying at least 3 tons each moved south daily on Rt 911 and Rt 23. 4 additional trucks (estimated average) carried troops daily.
1966 Rainy Season	Combination of landslides and bomb craters prevent through truck traffic from Rt 9 southward. Local truck traffic supplemented by coolie portage moves some supplies.

Despite the present closure to through traffic, reports indicate that there is some truck traffic between intermediate points on the main infiltration route. Since the Communists apparently are not making any significant attempt to repair the damaged roads or to construct bypasses during the rainy season, coolie portage is almost certainly being used to bypass the unusable stretches of road.

The logistical capacity of the Communist roadnet in Laos has been significantly reduced during the current rainy season, but even so it probably is still in excess of the greater requirements currently forced on it by the increased numbers of troops and the expanded scale of combat in South Vietnam. If the Communists fail to make an all-out road repair effort, the combined effects of weather and air interdiction will probably continue to reduce the Laotian roadnet's capacity until at least the end of the rainy season in October. Consequently, withdrawals from caches and, possibly, attempts to increase movement by other means such as water transport or direct movement across the Demilitarized Zone may be expected. Recent preliminary construction on the southern terminus of North Vietnam Route 102 may presage the latter possibility.



ADDITIONS TO MAIN COMMUNIST ROADNET

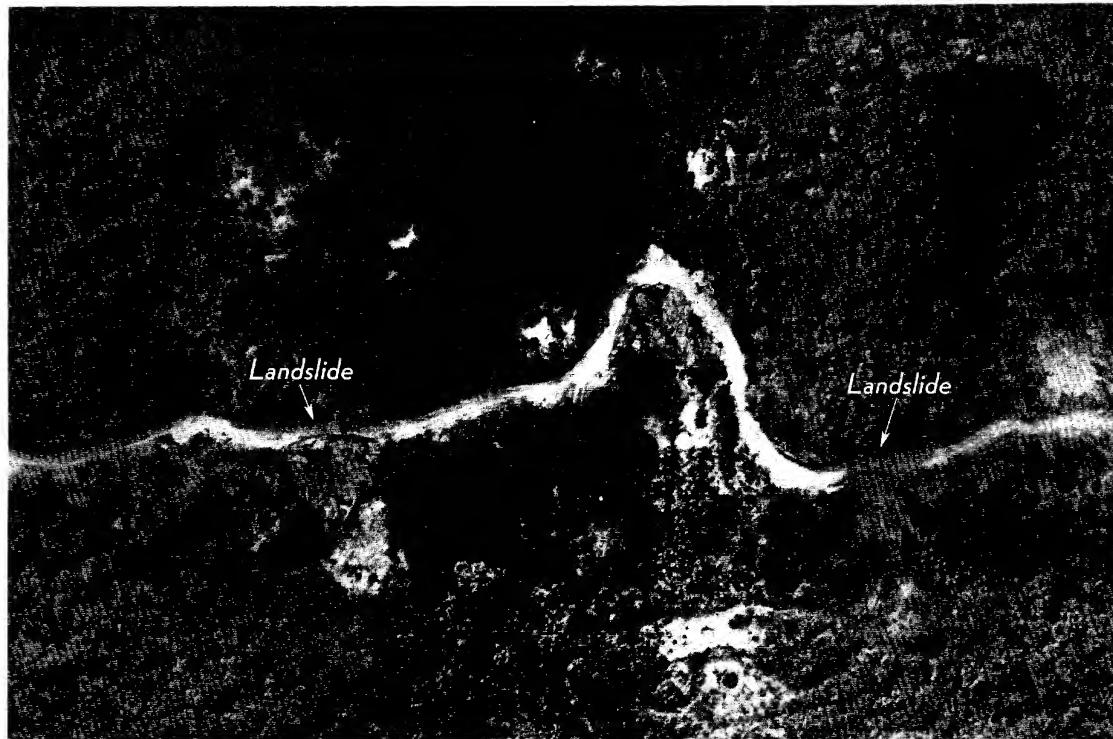
February 1965-May 1966

- Motorable roads available to Communist on 1 Feb 1965
- Road developed in dry season
- Road developed in rainy season

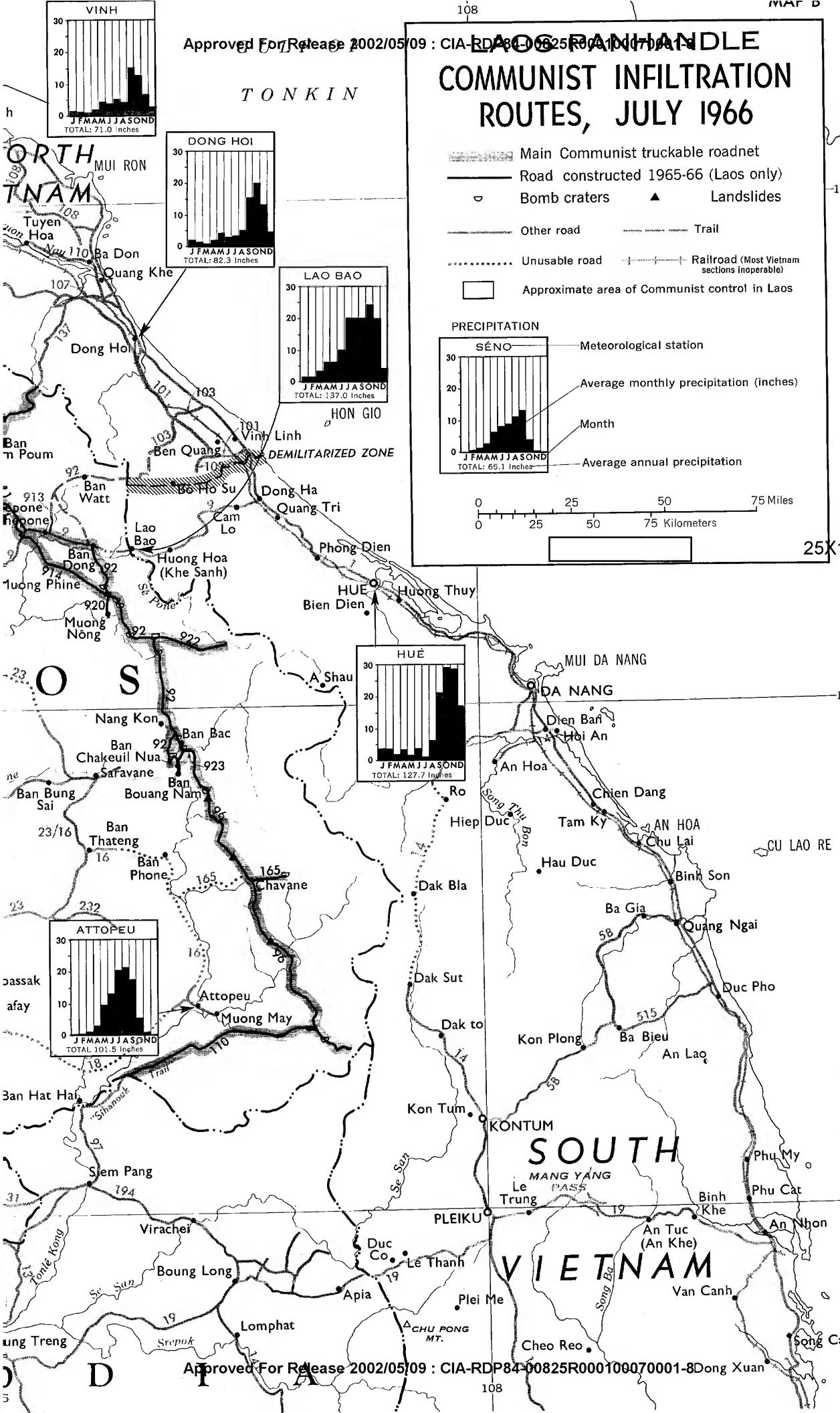
Dates indicate approximate construction period.

0 25 50 75 100 Miles
0 25 50 75 100 Kilometers

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ROUTE 96 AT 15°40'N., 106°54'E. SHOWING COLLAPSE OF ROAD EMBANKMENT (3 JUNE 1966). Landslides and bomb craters effected by air interdiction have temporarily closed Routes 92 and 96 as well as Route 110 to through truck traffic.



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Consideration of the Revision of GM 66-4, May 1966

1. The GM is dated May 1966, but roughly 5 weeks later, it has been outdated by subsequent developments, notably the effects of the rainy season. Its readers -- including the White House -- may be laboring under the belief that the information in the GM is still entirely valid. I believe there is an obligation to use the same publication vehicle -- a revised GM -- to update the information for these readers.

2. These ^{points} ~~points~~ must be made:

a) Some stretches of road which had been estimated to be all-weather have become impassable due to major washouts.

b) Some stretches have been effectively interdicted by bomb craters.

3. Little if any effort is being made by the Communists to repair the natural washouts or the cratering. This lack of action on the part of the Communists should be called to the attention of higher levels: does it mean that the Communists already have ample caches in South Vietnam, does it mean they are depending on ocean LOC, or are they "hurting"? Possibly, Transportation Branch, ERA, should be asked to estimate the total amount of supplies that have moved down the road net during the last dry season.

4. We now believe, contrary to what was stated in the GM, that Route 15 is probably no longer the main access route from North Vietnam into Laos. The new route 137/912 is now probably equally important,

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